

Message Text

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SUBJECT: QUEBEC PUBLIC SECTOR COMMON FRONT HOLDS FOUR HOUR
WORK STOPPAGE TO PROTEST SLOW PACE OF CONTRACT
TALKS

REF: QUEBEC A-9, OTTAWA A-52

1. THE COMMON FRONT OF PUBLIC AND PARA-PUBLIC EMPLOYEES
LAUNCHED ITS FIRST MAJOR OFFENSIVE AGAINST THE PROVINCIAL
GOVERNMENT FEBRUARY 26. WORK STOPPED IN SCHOOLS AND HOSPI-
TALS THROUGHOUT THE PROVINCE AS MORE THAN QPPNPPP TEACHERS
AND HOSPITAL WORKERS WALKED OFF JOBS OR HELD STUDY SESSIONS
YESTERDAY AFTERNOON IN MASSIVE SHOW OF PROTEST AGAINST SLOW
PACE OF CONTRACT TALKS WITH GOQ. IT APPEARS THAT GOVT S
REPLY WILL FOLLOW HARD LINE INCLUDING REPRISAL FOR SOME
ILLEGAL WALKOFFS. THE GOVT HAS MOMENTARILY SUSPENDED NEGO-
TIATIONS AS RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO SIDES HAVE STEADILY
WORSENERD.

2. THE COMMON FRONT, GROUPING PUBLIC SECTOR EMPLOYEES FROM
THE CONFEDERATION OF NATIONAL TRADE UNIONS (CNTU), THE QUEBEC
TEACHERS CORPORATION (CEQ), AND THE QUEBEC FEDERATION OF
LABOR (QFL), IS SEEKING GOVT CONCESSIONS IN CONTRACT TALKS
WHICH HAVE BEEN PROCEEDING ON AND OFF SINCE LAST APRIL WHEN
THE UNIONS FIRST PRESENTED DEMANDS. GOVT OFFERS WERE NOT
PRESENTED UNTIL NOVEMBER (AFTER FEDERAL WAGE AND PRICECON-
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TROLS WENT INTO EFFECT). QUEBEC WORKERS THUS WERE PUT AT

DISADVANTAGE IN SEEKING PARITY WITH WORKERS ACROSS CANADA. LATEST GOVT OFFERS OF 8 PERCENT REAL INCREASE DO NOT NEARLY SATISFY UNION DEMANDS OF 23 PERCENT.

3. UNION MEMBERS BEGAN EXERTING PRESSURE TACTICS LAST FALL WHEN CONTRACT TALKS STALLED. YESTERDAY S STUDY SESSION, FOR EXAMPLE, WAS AT LEAST EIGHTH DISRUPTION IN SOME JUNIOR COLLEGES. PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS HAVE ALSO BEEN AFFECTED AND MANY PARENTS FEAR THAT SCHOOL YEAR MAY BE TRUNCATED. INJUNCTIONS HAVE ALREADY BEEN USED TO KEEP REBELLIOUS HOSPITAL WORKERS ON THE JOB.

COMMENT:

4. YESTERDAY S 4-HOUR WORK STOPPAGE IS THOUGHT BY MANY TO BE DRESS REHEARSAL FOR POSSIBLE MARCH GENERAL STRIKE. UNION LEADERS ARE PREPARING FOR A MARCH 7 STRATEGY MEETING AT WHICH THEY MAY CALL STRIKE VOTE. THE DURATION OF SUCH A STRIKE REMAINS UNDECIDED. IF THEY GO OUT, COMMON FRONT LEADERS HOPE TO INVOLVE PRIVATE SECTOR AS WELL. IN FACT, SOME UNION STRATEGISTS HAVE SUGGESTED POSTPONING STRIKE ACTION UNTIL MAY WHEN PRIVATE SECTOR CONSTRUCTION WORKERS WHO WILL BE IN CONTRACT TALKS OF THEIR OWN MIGHT BE DISPOSED TO ADD THEIR WEIGHT TO A GENERAL STRIKE. TEACHERS, HOWEVER, MAY NOT BE WILLING TO WAIT THAT LONG DUE TO APPROACHING END OF SCHOOL YEAR. QFL PRESIDENT LOUIS LABERGE HAS ALSO CALLED ON WORKERS ACROSS PROVINCE, INCLUDING THOSE IN CNTU AND CEQ, TO STRIKE (IF THEY HAVE THE RIGHT) ON MARCH 22 AND JOIN PLANNED CLC OTTAWA DEMONSTRATION TO PROTEST GOC ANTI-INFLATION POLICY. CNTU AND CEQ LEADERS, HOWEVER, ARE FOCUSING PRIMARILY ON THE STRUGGLE WITH BOURASSA. INDEED, THOSE TWO UNIONS WERE THE BACKBONE OF YESTERDAY S WALKOUT.

5. IN 1972 PREMIER BOURASSA LEGISLATED END TO COMMON FRONT GENERAL STRIKE AND JAILED UNION LEADERS. PUBLIC SYMPATHY HAD TURNED AGAINST STRIKERS DUE TO CHAOS IN HOSPITALS BROUGHT ON BY LACK OF ESSENTIAL SERVICES. IN PRESENT NEGOTIATIONS, GOVT MAY BE HOPING FOR MASS STRIKE TO AGAIN TURN PUBLIC SENTIMENT AND PAVE WAY FOR LEGISLATED SETTLEMENT. IN YESTERDAY S ACTION, UNIONS WERE CAREFUL TO CONTINUE NECESSARY SERVICES IN HOSPITALS AND AVOID ALIENATING THE PUBLIC. WALKOUT WAS GENERALLY CONSIDERED SUCCESS BY UNION LEADERS PLEASED WITH LARGE PARTICIPATION. PRELIMINARY GOVT REACTION HAS BEEN TOUGH AND THOSE WHO WALKED OFF ILLEGALLY MAY BE PROSECUTED.

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THE TEMPORARY SUSPENSION OF NEGOTIATIONS DAMPENS HOPE FOR SHORT-TERM SETTLEMENT AND NOW-BOLSTERED UNION RESOLVE SEEMS TO PROMISE CONTINUED AND WIDER STRIKE ACTION.
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